

THE HOLY WARS: THEIR OBJECT AND RESULTS.

DURING the first years of Islamism the Christian nations felt little reason for concern as to their own future. Regarding the new religionists as a mere horde of children of the desert, they could not realize that their own peace, still less their independence in the political order, would ever be seriously threatened from that quarter. And even if they had foreseen the great spread of Mohammedanism, and all the baneful consequences thence, of necessity, to ensue, they were just then in no condition to forestall the enemy's attack. As yet Christendom was not united in the Western Empire, and when, in time, that effort of pontifical statesmanship opened a new era of strength and prosperity to Europe, the arrogance, and afterward the schism, of the Greeks prevented any unanimous action against the enemies of the Christian name. But in the eleventh century, the invasion of the Seljuk Turks, who had abandoned the religion of Zoroaster for Islamism, infused a northern ferocity into the comparatively soft nature of the Arabs, and during the pontificate of St. Gregory VII. the Crescent was frequently seen from the towers of Constantinople. From time to time Europe was horrified by accounts of the fearful

oppression endured by the Christians of Palestine; of bishops and priests being dragged from the altar to prison; of brutal outrages upon persons of both sexes and of every age.

The schismatic arrogance of the Greeks was compelled to yield, and the Emperor Michael Ducas (*Parapinax*) begged for aid from the detested Latins. St. Gregory VII. heeded the cry, and, although he knew that the promise was extorted by dire temporal necessity, and not by regard for religious unity, he was disposed to believe that Ducas was sincere in the avowed intention to put an end to the schism. All Christendom was invited to raise an army for the service of God, and the Pontiff declared in a letter to King Henry IV. of Germany that he hoped, "having pacified the Normans, to himself proceed to Constantinople, in aid of the Christians." Fifty thousand warriors promised to follow him, but other interests prevailed, and the great enterprise was postponed, until Pope Victor III. had the satisfaction, in 1088, of seeing the Genoese, Pisans, and other Italians, receive from his hands the standard of St. Peter, and set out to fight for the Cross and for civilization. This first expedition to check the inroads of Mohammedanism was comparatively successful. Landing in Africa, it destroyed or disabled more than a hundred thousand Saracens, burned a city, imposed tribute on a Moorish king, and returned to Italy with many rich spoils, which were used to decorate the churches of the victors.* But this inroad into the domains of

* Leo of Ostia (Marsicanus): in Baronio.

Islam was merely a prelude to the great Crusades.

The impulse to the first Crusade (1096–1100) was given by an obscure individual, rude in feature and in manner, but who had been raised by solitude and prayer to such sanctity, that he was popularly supposed to enjoy direct communication with Heaven. Known only as Peter the Hermit, he left his native Amiens in 1093, and made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Touched to the quick by the melancholy condition of the holy places, he seemed to hear, while prostrate before the Holy Sepulchre, the voice of Jesus commanding: “Arise, Peter; go and announce to My people the end of their oppression. Let My servants come, and the Holy Land shall be freed.” He returned to Europe, and falling at the feet of Pope Urban II., he urged that Pontiff to carry out the design of his predecessors. The Pope blessed him, and commissioned him to preach a Crusade; he did so throughout Europe, travelling barefooted and bareheaded, clothed in sackcloth, crucifix in hand, and mounted on a mule. William of Tyre (*ob.* about 1180) tells us that Peter was “insignificant in person, but his eye was keen and pleasing, and he possessed an easy flow of eloquence.” Everywhere he astonished people by his austerities, and moved their sympathies by his graphic picture of the woes of Palestine. He cried to sinners: “Soldiers of the demon, become warriors of Christ;” and all who had crimes to expiate or injuries to

repair seized on this means of reconciling themselves with God. The feudatories, the younger sons of reigning families (all trained to war, and having scarcely any other means of occupying their time), joyfully volunteered.

While Peter was thus engaged, there came from Constantinople letters from the Greek Emperor, Alexis Comnenus, begging aid from the Latins, as the “new Rome” was in imminent danger of falling into the hands of its enemies. In 1095 Urban II. convoked a council at Piacenza to devise ways and means. Over 200 bishops, 4,000 priests, and 30,000 laymen, listened to the Pontiff’s discourse, which was delivered in the open air. Another assembly was ordered to convene at Clermont in Auvergne, and on November 18 of the same year, 238 bishops obeyed the summons. Here the Pontiff made use of every argument, religious and political, to further the cause. From his discourse, not as embellished by Michaud, but as it was recorded in its simplicity by William of Malmesbury,* who was present at its delivery, we take the following passages:

“Go, my brothers, go with confidence to attack the enemies of God, who—oh, shame to Christians! —are so long in possession of Syria and Armenia. Long since they mastered all Asia Minor; and now they have insulted us in Illyria and all the neighbouring regions, even so far as the Straits of St. George. And they have done worse: they have robbed us of

* “Deeds of the English Kings,” b. 4, y. 1095.

the tomb of Jesus Christ, that wonderful monument of our faith ; they sell to our pilgrims permission to enter a city which would be open to Christians alone, if we had only a little of our ancient valor. Ought not our faces to be suffused with blushes of shame ? Who, unless they who envy the Christian glory, can suffer the indignity of not being able to share with the infidels at least a half of the world ? Christians, put an end to your own misdeeds, and let concord reign among you while in these distant lands. Go, then, and in this most noble enterprise show the valor and prudence you now display in your intestine contests. Go, ye warriors, and your praises will everywhere be heard. Let the well-known bravery of the French be shown in the van ; followed by the allies, their very name will terrify the enemy. . . . If necessary, your bodies will redeem your souls.

“Do you, men of courage and of exemplary intrepidity, fear death ? Human wickedness can invent nothing to injure you which is to be compared with celestial glory. Do you not know that life is a misery to man, and that happiness is in death ? The sermons of priests have caused us to receive this doctrine with our mother’s milk ; and the martyrs, our ancestors, sustained this doctrine with their example. . . . The sanctuary of God repels the spoiler and the ribald, and welcomes the pious man. Let not the love of your relatives impede you ; principally to God does man owe his love. Let not your progress be arrested by your affection for your native

land; for the entire world may be regarded as a place of exile for Christians, and their country as the entire world. Let no one remain at home because of his riches; for greater wealth is promised him—a wealth composed, not of those things which soften our misery only with vain expectation, but of those which perpetual and daily instances show us are the only true riches. . . . These things I publish and command, and for their execution I appoint the end of the coming spring.”

Throughout the assembly was then heard the cry which the Crusaders were to render famous, “God wills it!” A cardinal recited the formula of general confession; all repeated it, and received absolution. Admar de Monteil, Bishop of Puy, received the cross as Papal Legate, and this emblem of the Crusade was then given to nearly all the barons and even to many bishops.

The first Crusade lasted from 1096 to 1100; the second, from 1147 to 1149; the third, from 1189 to 1193; the fourth, from 1202 to 1204; the fifth and sixth, from 1218 to 1239; the seventh and eight, from 1248 to 1270. Frequent attempts were afterwards made to renew these holy wars, and many isolated expeditions were undertaken; but, as Pomponne, Minister of Louis XIV., remarked to Leibnitz, “since the time of St. Louis, such things have been out of fashion.” Bacon wrote a dialogue on the Holy War. Mazarin left 600,000 livres to help a Crusade. The famous Friar Joseph, the Francis-

can counsellor of Richelieu, composed on this subject a Latin poem which Pope Urban VIII. called the Christian *Aeneid*. In 1670 Leibnitz tried to induce Louis XIV. to conquer Egypt, and in his design, reduced to writing, he said:

“Then Europe will rest, will cease to tear her own bowels, and will fix her attention where she may find honor, victory, advantage, and wealth, with a good conscience, and in a manner pleasing to God. Then men will not rival one another in robbery, but in reducing the power of the hereditary foe; each one will strive to extend, not his own kingdom, but that of Christ. . . . Let us suppose that the Emperor, Poland, and Sweden, proceed together against the barbarians, and seek to widen the limits of Christendom, having no other designs, and fearing no enemies in their rear: how the blessing of God would show itself in favor of so just a cause! On the other hand, England and Denmark would find themselves in front of North America; Spain, before South; Holland, before the West Indies. France is destined by Providence to be the guide to Christian armies in the East, to give to Christendom her Godfreys, her Baldwins, and especially her SS. Louis, who will invade that Africa just opposite her shores, to destroy a nest of pirates and to conquer Egypt—she wants neither the soldiers nor the money necessary to become the mistress of that land. . . . Behold a way to acquire a lasting glory, a tranquil conscience, universal applause, certain victory, immense advantages. Then will

be attained that hope of the philosopher, that men will make war only on wolves and other wild beasts, to which the barbarians and infidels may now be compared.”*

Those who desire, in the matter of the Crusades, details of fact, causes, and effects, should consult the “Deeds of God through the Franks,” by William of Tyre; and the history written by the Imperial Anna Comnena. Among moderns we may read with profit the “Spirit of the Crusades,” by De-Maillet; and the “History of the Crusades,” by Michaud, which, although full of prejudice, is the most complete of all works on this subject. Much information may also be gained from the “Life of

* Dissertation by Guhrauer, in “Memoires of the Institute of France,” Vol. I.—Cantù agrees with Leibnitz: “Suppose that the lion of St. Mark and the dragon of St. George had made a permanent home on the banks of the Bosphorus, the Jordan, and the Tigris. A civilized population would now enjoy that beauty which of old made them envied centres of culture; Seleucia, Antioch, Bagdad, would be the London and Paris of Asia; where now a pasha, with flail and scimitar, bends the peoples before the caprices of a despot, and where the Bedouins practise robbery and piracy with impunity, would now flourish governments founded in order and liberty; from the most beautiful city under the sun would flow streams of culture and of love over Asia and Europe, united in affection and in progress, to improve the North, and spread the light of truth in the heart of Africa and in the farthest regions of the East. If a hermit had not raised that cry, if the Popes had not taken it up, the growing civilization of Europe would have succumbed to the Arabs; the religion of love and of liberty would have yielded up our countries to one of blood and of slavery, and over the beautiful lands of Italy and France would reign a brutal domestic and political tyranny, a haughty immobility, a fatal indifference, a systematic ignorance.”

Innocent III.," by Hurter; and from Prat's "Peter the Hermit and the First Crusade." The French Academy of Inscriptions published, in 1841, a collection of all the Latin, Greek, and Oriental historians of the Crusades; the Greek portion being composed of fragments of Nicephorus Briennius, Anna Comnena, Nicetas Coniates, John Phocas, and Michael Attaliates. As for the modern English authors who have written on the Crusades, some are pretentious, few recommendable. Of all who, in any language, have treated this subject, Cantù is the most impartial, and the most appreciative of the spirit which prompted and sustained one of the most salient features of the Middle Age; he will also fully satisfy the reader's curiosity as to chivalry, tournaments, "courts of love," the oaths customary at the time, the military religious orders, the *trovatori*—an acquaintance with all of which matters will greatly facilitate a comprehension of the events of the Crusades.

Many causes have contributed to an unjust appreciation of the value of the Crusades, but they may be all referred to the difficulty experienced by the average modern mind in understanding the spirit of the Middle Age. Add to this the fact that these Holy Wars were pre-eminently the work of the Roman Pontiffs, and, therefore, a natural object of carping criticism to all the foes of Catholicism, and you will be surprised when you find, now and then, a Protestant or an infidel writer who can see in them aught else but cruel injustice to both Christian

and Islamite; or, at best, anything better than sublime folly. In defending the policy that prompted these Crusades, in upholding their justice, in contending that they were necessary, humanly speaking, to the very existence of Christianity, we do not apologize for each and every action of their leaders, or of the rank and file of their participants; it is but too true that, as in other noble designs, many of the instruments were found to be full of flaws. We must distinguish the motives of the Crusaders.

The Popes, most of the kings and princes, and nearly all the leaders, who took part in these expeditions, were impelled by the desire of banishing the infidel from the places sanctified by the life and death of the God-Man—by the desire of freeing a Christian people from a slavery that was cruel to the body and threatening to the soul. They felt the necessity of arresting the progress of an inexorable and barbarous enemy, who was menacing that Christian civilization which the Catholic Church had developed in nearly the whole, and was then planting in the rest, of Europe; they knew that the most efficacious means of doing this was by carrying war into Asia and Africa, by convincing Islam that Christendom could fight as well as pray. These motives were certainly noble. But among the masses, while the religious motive undoubtedly predominated with the immense majority, so that it may truly be said to have furnished the life and soul of the expeditions, other motives were sometimes mingled—

some of them base, some indifferent. Many who groaned at home under the feudal system hoped to find another lot awaiting them in the East; some were impelled by a curiosity to see those lands about which pilgrims had told such wonderful stories; some, undoubtedly, were incited by mere love of adventure. If these latter classes were guilty of excesses—nay, if even some of the leaders acted more like *condottieri* than like soldiers of Christ—the good name of the cause should not suffer.

Those who affect horror at the sacrifice of two millions of Christian lives during the two centuries of the Crusades, do not, as a general thing, descant upon the great loss of life that purely secular wars have entailed, and yet entail, upon mankind. And how great is the difference between these and the Holy Wars, both as to causes and effects! In the former, in nearly every case, men are taken from their firesides to kill and be killed without knowing the reason for it; in the latter, they knew, thoroughly appreciated, and heartily applauded the reason. But, we are told, this knowledge, this appreciation, was that of superstition, and the hope of success was a folly. The Crusaders were certainly guilty of superstition, if a vivid and life-sacrificing devotion to our faith, if a hearty reverence for everything connected with that faith, be superstition. We need not pause here to show that Christianity, felt and outwardly professed, is not superstition.

But what about the folly of these wars? Not that supernatural effervescence which is known as

the folly of the Cross—for if that be understood, the Crusades *were* a folly—but a sheer absurdity is here intended. Well, now that the holy fever is at an end, and we can calmly criticise each and every one of its symptoms and consequences, many errors of management are discoverable; but at the time the attack on the strongholds of Islam was decreed, every reason, military and political, could be adduced for the success of the project. Common sense assured the Western nations that the Byzantine Emperor, bearing, as he did, the first brunt of the Mussulman attack, would cordially and gratefully assist the enterprise; who could have foreseen the insane treachery of the entire schismatic tribe?

But what of the justice of the Crusades? The Islamites were pronounced religious and political enemies of the European nations. It was of the very essence of their religion—and too well did they practise it—to spread their faith by fire and sword, to enjoy the earth and its fullness. They had already subjugated the once flourishing Christian states of the East, and in many of them had almost destroyed every vestige of the Christian religion; they had conquered a great part of the Iberian Peninsula; they had devastated a large portion of Italy, and, for a time, had even threatened France; in fine, to the Mussulman every war against a Christian state or community was holy. Where was the injustice of warring against such a race of men? Consider also that war, and war

à l'outrance, was the only means by which Europe could save herself from barbarism, her women from degradation, her children from slavery.

Our age affects to detest mere sentiment, and is pre-eminently utilitarian. For this very reason it should admire the Crusades. The first great advantage they brought to Europe was frequent internal peace where intestine war had been the order of the day; the Christian swords that had so often crossed one another in unworthy strife were now turned against the common enemy of the Christian altar and of every Christian government. The Normans and other ferocious Northerners, who would have impeded the progress of civilization along the shores of the Baltic and the German Ocean, found an outlet for their warklike enthusiasm in distant Asia; and “this expedition” (the second Crusade) says Krantz (“Sax.,” c. 13) “at least effected the freeing of Germany from a set of men who lived by robbing others.” Many a district hitherto living in awe of some petty tyrant, who, like an eagle from his eyry, had been wont to pounce down upon it on an errand of rapine, thanked the campaigns of Asia and Africa for affording such men an opportunity of satisfying their tastes away from home. Thousands of serfs, by taking the Cross, threw off the yoke of what was little less than slavery; for the Crusader became a servant of God and of the Church, and a freeman. Strangers who took up their abode in

the domains of some petty lord, used to become his serfs: now the pilgrim was sacred.

Industry was advanced by means of the Crusades. The silks of Damascus were coveted by the Westerns, and Palermo, Lucca, Modena, and Milan became noted for the fabrics they wove for the lords and ladies who were no longer satisfied with the skins of beasts for clothing. The glassware of Tyre was introduced by the Venetians, and soon the ingenious sons of the Republic manufactured the beautiful and delicate crystals which have given its artisans celebrity to our own day. Wind-mills, till then not used, if at all known, in Europe, were copied from those in Asia Minor, where they were necessary, owing to the want of running waters. The goldsmith's art received an impetus from the numerous reliques and gems brought from the Orient, and which had to be richly set and mounted.

Another advantage of the Crusades was the better administration of justice; when intestine war had become rare, order reappeared; the great ones of the earth commenced to consider their followers as their poor ones—*pauperes nostri*,—for these inferiors were now freed from local servitude, and began to unlearn the customs of hereditary serfdom. Government was better developed; communes and republics came into existence, and gave equal laws even to the lands of the absent barons, elevating public over private power. The common

people, during the long absences of the lords, depended upon the superior power of the kings; and thus was prepared, for the ultimate good of the nation, the fall of feudalism. The royal authority was constantly being increased by the acquisition of fiefs, either made vacant by death, or sold to the crown that their lords might obtain money for the Holy Wars.

Still another advantage of the Crusades is thus described by Cantù: “In the fragmentary society of feudalism, each one’s country was bounded by the hedge that inclosed his field; it was expensive and dangerous to cross the bridge that spanned the neighboring little torrent, in sight of the castle of the next proprietor. But suddenly the barriers fall, and whole nations enter on roads hitherto closed. Then the Northerners beheld in Italy, the relics of ancient, and the commencement of a new, civilization; at Bologna, they heard lectures on the *Pandects*; at Salerno and Monte Cassino, they attended medical academies; at Thessalonica, they visited schools of fine art; at Constantinople, they inspected libraries and museums. James de Vitry expresses his wonder at finding the Italians ‘secret in counsel, diligent, studious, of public utility, careful for the future, detesting the yoke of another, ardent defenders of their liberties.’ In Sicily and in Venice, whither they came to embark, they found more regular forms of government, and their astonishment on seeing

all the citizens of Venice convoked to give assent to the decree of the doge, inspired ideas of a liberty very different from the German. When they were established on the new soil, they gave attention to a proper jurisprudence, which should not be imposed by force, but should be discussed by the reason of nations who deemed themselves equal, and who desired their own real advancement. The ‘Assizes’ that were then compiled became models for princes and communes; St. Louis profited by them for his ‘Establishments,’ and perhaps the English found in them the idea of their boasted jury. From the method of gathering tithes, then imposed by the Church, kings learned a regular system of taxes, which, if they became perpetual, at least ceased to be arbitrary and multifold.”

With reference to the effects which the Crusades produced on the arts and letters of Europe, the same author says: “Since it is certain that the Crusades retarded the fall of Constantinople, I believe that literature profited by them; for Europe was not yet sufficiently mature to receive the classics there preserved, as she did in the fifteenth century. In fact, of two rich libraries which then perished, no chronicler makes any mention, of so little account were they deemed; masterpieces of art were brutally ruined, unless when the Italians, especially the Venetians, preserved them to decorate their own cities. Look at Pisa, Genoa, and

the Norman edifices in Italy, and you will find them rich in columns and statues transferred from the East,—a fact which reveals a resurrection of the sentiment of the beautiful, and explains the sudden development of the arts among us. Literature came forth from the sanctuary when all took part in universal enterprises; style was elevated when history passed from municipal events to prodigies of valor; poetry found in reality that at which, by mere imagination, it would never have arrived.”*

The Crusades were also of great benefit to commerce. The commercial cities of Italy made immense profits by transporting warriors and pilgrims; and they obtained great privileges in the conquered lands, establishing banks in Syria and along the Ionian and the Black Sea. Then began the commercial prosperity of what are now Belgium and Holland, of the south of France, of Bremen and Lubeck. Citizens became wealthy, and were soon so powerful that they were able to exact rights and privileges. The sugar cane used by the Crusaders at Lebanon to assuage their terrible thirst, was transplanted to Sicily, thence carried by the Saracens to Granada, and from there taken by the Spaniards to America. Europe became acquainted with alum, indigo, and many other valuable drugs and spices; afterwards, while engaged in a search for a quick passage to the land that produced them, an Italian navigator discovered a new world.

* “*Storia Univ.*,” b. xii, c. 18.

The Crusades failed of their main object—the freedom of the Holy Land,—but they checked the progress of Mohammedanism, and permitted the continuance of the work of civilization in Europe. They need no apology; had they fully succeeded, Europe, Asia, and Africa would now, in all probability, be entirely Christian. Their main idea was both politic and just. It was certainly good policy to give rest to a state by transporting its disturbers beyond the seas; to turn this fury against the barbarians. It was certainly just to combat a ferocious people, an article of whose religion was to exterminate Christians, and who had already ravaged all Southern Europe.*

* Was not that system of solidarity, which in the Middle Age bound the Catholic nations together by the principles of a common faith, at least as just and respectable as that modern international solidarity, styled European balance of power, which is based on a shifting policy, and on merely earthly interests? Ottoman barbarism everywhere rampant under the Crescent; Christian civilization on the defensive under the Cross; Islamism menacing the world with its impure torrents, and Christianity striking home at its implacable enemy—behold, in its most natural and philosophical aspect, the entire history of the Crusades. (Berault: “Hist. Gen. de l’Eglise,” vol. xii, p. 596.)